

Difference between religious Life in BRITAIN and JAPAN

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《Preface》

First of all, I would like to set out about the reason why I decided on the theme “Difference between religious life in BRITAIN and JAPAN”.

One day, during the second week after I came to Buckingham, I was talking about some topics with my host family after supper. The conversation turned to Cremation. It happened because I am an Anglican priest from Japan.

I had imagined that there would be so many grave stones around Churches in Britain. However I could not see any tombs around this parish Church. The parish Church in Buckingham is relatively new, because it was built about 200 years ago (200 years is usually “new” in Britain). The old Church was struck by lightning and burned down. Then the Church was rebuilt on the Castle’s Hill instead of the old site.

Of course we can see many Churches with a lot of tombs around them in England nowadays. And there is a large graveyard in Buckingham. But I knew that Cremation became common in Britain. Through talking with my host family, I felt that the circumstances of the

funerals had been changing in Britain in recent years. So I decided to describe the difference of religious life between Britain and Japan. Especially I shall select some main stages from people's journey from Birth to Death.

《Birth》

〈In Britain〉

In Britain, parents take their baby to Church after it is born, and their priest baptizes the baby in the Christening service and gives it a christian name.

At the Baptism, the parents and Godparents are normally present.

In the service, they usually have a "Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child".

In addition, a special prayer "Thanksgiving after Adoption" has been prepared in The Prayer Book for adoptive parents. It is a very impressive one for me. We do not have these kinds of ceremony in The Prayer Book in Japan.

United Kingdom Churches have been having some problems. One of this is the decline of the Christian population. According to the U. K. Christian Handbook 1989~1990 Edition, the percentage of Christians in the adult population was 20.7% in 1970. But by 1990, it had decreased to 14.4%.

Further, Abortion in U. K. increased almost two times in these 20 years, and Illegitimate births increased two times in this 20 years, too.

We sometimes heard that U. K. Churches are losing their influence on people. I feel the distress of U. K. Churches. But I feel that for example, one effect of this was that the Church of England decided to

revise Common Prayer. Of course I know that all the laity did not feel satisfaction. It is the same in Japan, but at least it is certain that newcomers will be at ease to come and continue the Church life in Japan.

From my point of view, as one who lives in a non-christian country, it is difficult to say that the Church is always right. I think the most important question is how can the Church take on the distress of the age and the people. We Japanese Christians began to be aware of these things in recent years, through the 50th Anniversary of World War II.

〈In Japan〉

There are two main streams of belief concerning religious initiation from Birth to Death. One is Shintoism and the other is Buddhism.

◇Shintoism

Parents usually visit a shrine for the ceremony of purification and naming with their baby who wears a traditional dress. Parents usually choose a name for their child, but sometimes they ask a fortune-teller.

◇Buddhism

A Special temple ceremony for a baby's birth is not usually practised. I have rarely heard that a Buddhist priest has given the name to a baby for a devout Buddhist.

※For your information

In Japan, the fashion in names has changed. For example, there were many girls with names ending in “—ko”. But 130 years ago, the “—ko” ending was used by the imperial family. And people were not allowed to have their family name unless they were of the “Shizoku class (Soldier's class)”. After the “Edo-era” ended, the government allowed

people to have a family name and a first name could be anything they wanted. Therefore the used of “—ko” became popular, but today it is decreasing, and new names are increasing. New names do not often have “The syllable KO” at the end of the name.

◇Christianity

Christians are a minority in Japan. The Christian population is less than 1 % of the Japanese population. They follow the traditional custom of their own churches.

Births and Abortions

	1970	1975	1980	1983	1985	1987
Number of birth Births per	903,900	603,400	753,700	721,500	750,700	742,000
1,000 population	16.2	10.7	13.4	12.8	13.2	13.0
%illegitimate	8 %	9 %	12%	15%	19%	21%
Number of abortions	76,000	106,200	128,900	127,400	141,100	156,200
Cumulative abortions since 1967 Act	158,400	687,800	1,253,800	1,638,400	1,915,900	2,218,300

Marriages and Divorces in England and Wales

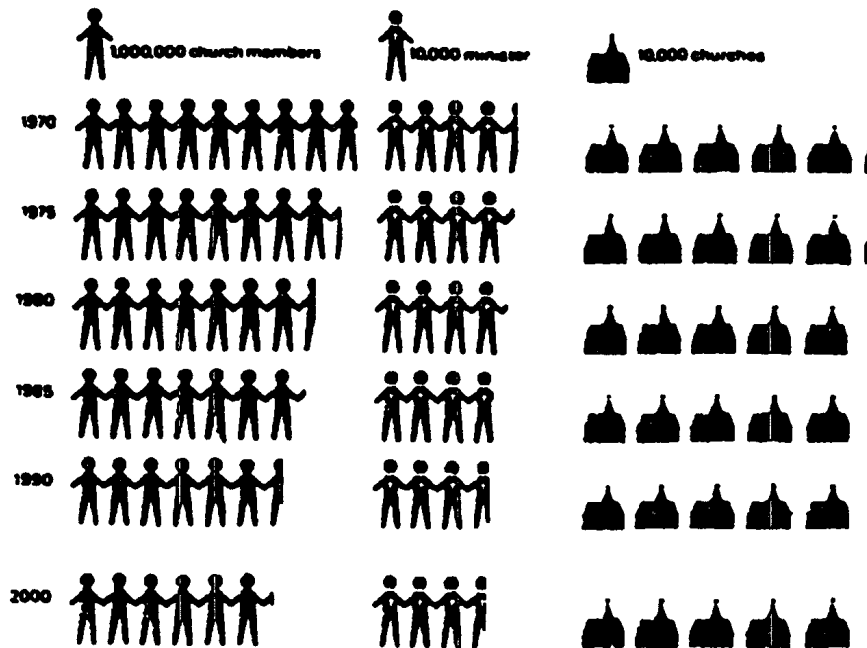
	1970	1975	1980	1983	1985	1987
Number of marriages	415,487	380,620	370,022	344,334	346,389	347,924
%in church or religios building	60%	52%	50%	51%	51%	52%
%religious marriages which are Anglican	68%	52%	66%	66%	66%	66%
Number of divorces	58,200	120,500	148,301	147,479	160,300	153,903

Cumulative proportion of marriages ending in divorce

after 15 years	23%		
after 10 years	16%	20%	
after 5 years	7%	10%	12%

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Fig 4 Number of adult Church Members, Ministers and Churches 1970–2000



“U. K. Christian Handbook” 1989–1990 Edition

《Confirmation or Coming-of-age ceremony》

〈In Britain〉

They do not have a “Coming of Age” ceremony in particular, but “Confirmation” is respected as a kind of “Coming of Age”. People have been used to thinking of it as a ceremony to become an adult who is conscious of what it means to be a Christian. A person who has accepted confirmation can eat the Host and drink the Wine after this ceremony. And people often celebrate their own “Coming of Age” with their family. The year of the day varies, and some people have their celebration on their 21st or 25th birthday. 25 years is counted as the cycle of one generation.

Incidentally, they can vote in elections when they become 18 years old.

〈In Japan〉

They celebrate a “Coming of Age” ceremony in the year when they become 20 years old. They can vote from this year.

On 15th January, the Local Government invites them to the City Hall, and the Mayor gives a message and a present to each one. They often have a photograph taken to remember the occasion. Ladies especially, wear “Kimono” or special dress for this. The 15th January is a national holiday.

Many national holidays in Japan have been connected with memorable events of the Imperial family or with Shintoism. I can see some evidence that the government took religious tradition into account after the “Meiji-era” when they set designated these national holidays.

A devout Buddhist takes part in a “Tokudo-shiki” as a “Coming of Age” ceremony, but it is uncommon. “Tokudo-shiki” means that they become a true disciple of Buddha. However, very few achieve this.

《Marriage》

〈In Britain〉

According to the ASB (Alternative Service Book), there are some notes as follows.

“The banns are to be published in the Church on three Sundays at the time of Divine Service by the officiant in the form set out in the Book of Common Prayer”.

Before the Marriage, the couple receive guidance from their Priest. In the wedding, the couple make their vows in front of God and people. Their families and friends usually attend the wedding. The bride’s family hold a “Reception” after the Wedding. Then the couple

generally go away for their honeymoon.

Nowadays, 52 % of the Marriages in Britain take place in a Church or some other religious building. And 62 % of Church Weddings are Anglican(1986).

〈In Japan〉

◇Shintoism

Before World War II, couples had their Wedding at a Shrine or at home. But in recent years, they have a shinto ceremony in a Hotel or a Ceremony Hall, and have a party too. Both families and witnesses attend the services. We can see evidence of long tradition in the Marriage ceremony. It is not only the joining of 2 single people but also 2 families. Therefore other friends of the bride and the groom only attend the reception, and not the Wedding. Couples vow their engagement with the exchange of rings. But this form was taken from Christianity in this half of the present century. In old times, there was just a prayer by priests in archaic language.

◇Buddhism

Devout Buddhists have a wedding with their family in their Temple. We see very few in a Hotel.

※For your information

In recent years, young couples have been wanted a “Christian style Wedding”. Then many Hotels made a Chapel on their premises. And some clergy have responded, and direct the ceremony, but it is rarely that the couples become Christian. These are just “christian style” weddings.

On the other hand, we can see a new trend. Young couples are beginning to come to Churches to have a real Wedding. They often become Christian. Weddings and Funerals often become an opportunity for

many people to encounter Christianity.

In ciden tally, our University is holding Weddings for the graduates after some preparation.

《Funerals》

〈In Britain〉

In 1986 70 % of funerals in U. K. were in Churches.

Traditionally, the body had been buried in the grave yard. But in 1970, 55 % of the dead were cremated. And in 1986, this increased to 68 %. We can see a big change in U. K. in recent years.

But it seems that people did not keep up the care fo ashes with the changes of customs.

In Church, almost 20 years ago, the colour black was used in the funeral service, but it was changed to white in 1989 by ABS (Alternative Service Book). Because originally, the death of a Christian had been thought of as a way to Heaven and the Resurrection in the day of the Last Judgement. It seems that people are thinking the dead body and ashes belonged to the past. The ashes are often scattered to the ground. I even heard they sometimes make a memorial stone without ashes. It seems an unbelievable thing for many Japanese.

Anyway we can say that funeral ceremonies in the U. K. one indication that Christianity is alive there.

〈In Japan〉

Many funerals in Japan have been held according to Buddhist rites but there very few Shinto funerals.

When we think about Japanese funerals, we can consider the great influence from the “Edo-era”. The government of that time had used the

temple as a centre of administration. It was a system to expose Christians in 300 years of the “Edo” era.

People were required to be a member of a Fixed Buddhist Temple.

Incidentally, in Japan, Bodies must be cremated by law. It has been so far half a century. In old days the coffin was often made of a big wooden tub in which the body was placed in a sitting position. Probably, this practise was a result of “Zazen” influence.

People often put the dead in the charnelhouse if they do not have a grave. After the cremation, we can see one typical scene at the crematorium. A staff member puts the ashes the Urn, then he picks a bone of the Adam’s Apple (we Japanese call it Nodobotoke) upon the ashes at the end. Then he proclaims that “This is the Idol of Buddha”. And people will all gasp. The staff always do this even if the attendants are all Christian.

In Japan, many people often have a misunderstanding that Christians are neglectful of their ancestors. Buddhism in Japan is similar to ancestor worship. This is one of the reasons why many Japanese find it hard to accept Christianity.

Devout Buddhists usually pray for their ancestors every month with their Buddhist priest. And they hardly know that Christian Worship (Holy Communion) includes the INTERCESSION for their ancestors every Sunday.

Anyway, when we analyse a Funeral thoroughly, we can say that buddhism is deeply connected with Japanese religious life.

Deaths and Cremation in UK

	1970	1975	1980	1983	1985	1986
Number of deaths	638,834	645,966	644,684	646,062	654,701	644,652
Death per 1,000 population	11.4	11.5	11.4	11.2	11.5	11.3
%cremations	55%	61%	65%	67%	68%	68%
%cremations which are Catholic	2 %	3 %	4 %	4 %	3 %	2 %

“U. K. Christian Handbook” 1989-1990 Edition

(This is what had been submitted as the Project of 5 weeks English course in Buckingham University on 1996. I attended the course with other students from St. Andrew's University.)

(本稿は、1996年度英国バッキンガム大学5週間英語コースの研究課題として提出したものである。筆者は本学からの学生とともにこのコースに参加した。)